



A CRITICAL OBSERVATION IN THE ACTIVITIES AND APPROACHES OF A CSO FOR MANIPUR'S TERRITORIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTEGRITY

Dr. Kadam Ibotombi Singh¹ | Dr. Narengbam Premjit Singh²

¹ Guest Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Manipur University.

² Correspondent, Jiri News Network, Jiribam, Manipur.

ABSTRACT

In the present paper, the researchers critically observed and analyzed the activities and approaches of UCM (United Committee Manipur), one of the most influential civil society organization of Manipur. An informal interview was conducted with a focus group including the current president and other member of the organisation for the primary data. But, the researchers also resort to secondary sources like written records and texts provided by UCM besides referring relevant articles, reputed journals and other secondary sources. Through the study, it has been revealed that UCM has a Para-political character and faces various constraints from being a low range entity, limited social domain and non-political party. Besides, UCM has taken up initiatives like bringing territorial and emotional integrity of Manipur, communal harmony, settling boundary issues and strengthening people's resilience.

KEY WORDS: UCM, CSO, Para-political, Public sphere.

INTRODUCTION

Jurgen Habermas (1974) says that "civil society locates between family and state". He further stated that the public sphere encourages rational will formation; it is a sphere of rational and democratic social interaction. Jilian Schwedler (1995) also points out that civil society emerges with the resurrection of the public sphere when individuals and groups begin to challenge boundaries of permissible behaviour—for example, by speaking out against the regime or demanding a government response to social needs—civil society begins to take shape. In the backdrop of this theoretical perspective on civil society, the present paper attempts to explore civil societies' influential initiatives into the ongoing conflicting situations in Manipur, a land in the far North-East region of India, once described as 'a burning-cauldron' by Ghurye (1980). The state has witnessed innumerable issues and chaosness from time to time since its inception as a state within the Indian Federal System. And as a response, endless claims and counter-claims over a range of sensitive issues have been reported and many civil society organisations, has thus, come up on the scene to take their active participation in keeping harmony and order between the state and the conflicting groups. Territorial and emotional integrity of Manipur seems to be the main objective of these civil societies in Manipur.

Objective of the study

The main specific objectives of the study are:

- i) To ascertain the status of the UCM as civil society organisation.
- ii) To highlight the constraints and initiatives of the UCM

Theoretical perspective

How are we to define civil society? The term "civil society," often equated with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or citizens' movements in everyday political parlance, is in fact a highly ambiguous concept (Schade 2002). In the history of political ideas, beginning with Aristotle and ending, at least provisionally, with Jürgen Habermas, the concept has been invested with some very different meanings. Citing Charles Taylor (1991: 52), civil society may be defined as "a web of autonomous associations independent of the state which, bound together in matters of common concern by mere existence or action, could have an effect on public policy." If, on the other hand, we base our definition on Jürgen Habermas (1992: 443), we would find that:

Civil society is made up of more or less spontaneously created associations, organizations and movements, which find, take up, condense and amplify the resonance of social problems in private life, and pass it on to the political realm or public sphere. Not without a sound dash of pragmatism, the present article will define civil-society actors as organizations which see themselves as such and meet at least two conditions: they must be independent of the state and they must be active in the realm of politics.

UCM as civil society

The United Committee Manipur, UCM was established on the 30th of July 2001, as an apex organization to spearhead the peoples' movement for protection and safeguarding of the territorial boundary of Manipur as one of its sole objective. In order to achieve its objectives UCM had to undergo different facets of activities such as maintenance of communal harmony, ethnic de-polarization, emotional

and social integration. Right after the Bangkok agreement between the Govt of India and NSCN(IM), there has been continuous demand for disintegration of Manipur in the name of Greater Nagalim, Southern Nagaland, alternative arrangement and so on. Even today their demand still continues, the latest being the framework agreement demand which was signed on the 3rd of August, 2015. Nothing has been spelled out regarding the framework agreement by any side, increasing the degree of uncertainty in the minds of the people of Manipur. On every occasion when time and situation demand United Committee of Manipur, UCM with the people had risen again and again to counter anything which is against the unity and polity and Manipur as a whole. One such glaring example is the extension of the ceasefire between GoI and NSCN (IM) into Manipur in 2001. When it was announced by the Union Home Minister Shri LK Advani, immediately there was a spontaneous people, outrageous reaction chanting slogans against the centre's decision. UCM was born and immediately thronged into action by converting the people's spontaneous reaction into a coordinated peoples' movement, which literally brought Imphal city paralyzed for nearly 3 months, ultimately resulting in the withdrawal of the cease fire extension and confinement of the agreement within the territorial limits of Nagaland. It was a people's victory. From thereon there is no turning back and UCM still continues to take the spearheading role in protecting and safeguarding the territorial boundary and emotional integrity of Manipur. The latest position that the United Committee Manipur, UCM had reiterated to the Govt of India is that

- i) The Govt of India should respect the political and historical distinctive identity of Manipur and nothing should be done to disrupt this unity.
- ii) The people of Manipur would not tolerate any compromise to its territorial boundary in appeasing any organization; the territorial boundary which was there at the time when Manipur joined the Indian Union on the 15th of Oct, 1949 should remain intact.
- iii) Anything sort of internal administrative arrangement based on ethnicity will not be accepted under any condition.
- iv) While respecting the ethos and aspiration of one group or organization which relates to a particular state, the Govt of India shall not disturb the peace and tranquillity of neighbouring states at all or simply to say any structural transformation of the appeasement policy of pan Naga cultural body or religious body cannot cross the territorial boundary of other states, it should be confined within the territorial boundary of Nagaland.

Another important objective of UCM is to constantly make vigil of the ethnic differences occurring at different levels in Manipur. In Manipur we have witnessed ethnic clashes in 1992-93 which resulted in the killing of around 1000 peoples and forced evacuation of around 550 villages all over the hill areas. The main reason for such ethnic communal violence was the pursuit of dominance of one ethnic group by another for territory. In fact, according to UCM, it was an orchestrated move by NSCN (IM) to set the table for their vested agenda by issuing a dictate or serving quit notices to many Kuki villages or accept forced conversion to Naga. Naganisation was the main reason for so many killing at that time. Many of the smaller tribes which population was less than ten thousand people belonging to the old kuki were converted into Naga. Now, Moyon, Maring, Tarao, Aimol, Monsang inhabiting around the areas of Chandel district are converted into

Naga. Elangbam Johnson, President of UCM stated that "Such orchestrated efforts of our permanent adversaries specially NSCN(IM), Nagaland Government and their puppet mouthpiece organisations are still continuing at large inciting poison of hatred among the various ethnic groups of Manipur to destabilize Manipur. But we must also remember that in the long process of 2000 years of written history, smallest of the smallest tribes whose population is below 5000 peoples still continue to live in fullest emancipation of traditional, customary and religious rights without any disturbance from any group. This is what we called the principle of peaceful coexistence and this has remained the driving philosophy of our society which is still maintained today and no one challenge this by false propaganda."

Acting on this note UCM with other liked minded organizations have started a state-wide movement to bring awareness and unity so as to strengthen the age old relationship of hill-valley people under the campaign brand called the Peoples movement for the common future of Manipur. And as continuing part of it and also to act as showdown to everyone trying to threaten Manipur's unity and territorial boundary, UCM with other organizations of the state jointly organized a Mass Rally entitled "Mass Rally for the Common Future of Manipur" which was unprecedented in the history of Manipur where more than five lakhs people attended on the 6th of February, 2016.

Organisational Structure of UCM

UCM is purely an apex civil society organization, consisting of various state level civil society organisations' representatives which operate on charity. Office bearers are appointed from various civil society organizations for a term of three years. The organization structure consists of

- I) General Assembly members
- II) Executive Committee holding various portfolios.
- III) Also have various units at districts and local bodies as UCM units and districts councils

Initiatives taken up by UCM

Apart from territorial integrity of Manipur as mentioned in the objectives, the initiatives taken up by the organisation for the overall stability of the state are as follows:

I. Communal harmony

As Manipur is multi pluralistic society, there is every possibility of differences which may occur between the different groups for different reasons. Land boundary dispute is a common form of ethnic feud which exists largely in the state. Sometimes it aggravated and violence followed. At such time UCM have continuously tried to intervene for an amicable solution. The recent incident of Keithelmanbi Kuki and Moidangpok village, the issue of land encroachment between Chingkhamb Kabui village and adjoining Muslim villages of Lilong, the boundary dispute between Tronglaobi and villages of Henglep divisions had been skilfully handled. Administrative anomalies cannot be converted into ethnic temperament is what UCM has been preaching and they are successful in their attempt. So far, in this regard nothing have occurred which can be termed as ethnic violence except some skirmishes. The incident of killing at Pallel at a Lai Haraoba procession was also timely intervened by UCM. Besides there are number of cases where UCM have worked in defusing tensions between various ethnic groups such as the incident of killing of some labourer at Thingshat near Mapao khullen by some underground groups which was transforming into an ethnic tension was rightly intervened by UCM.

II. Boundary

Another important activity of UCM is to preserve the territorial boundary of Manipur at all cost. Many border surveys have been conducted by UCM in this regard. Very recently, a team of UCM have visited the incursion of boundary line by Myanmar at Kwatha khunnou and was brought out into the limelight. Similar cases were brought up by UCM in Ukhrul districts at Wangle, Jessami also. UCM has been consistently demanding for demarcation of boundary lines base on mutual agreement based on traditional boundaries which are identified by the inhabiting peoples on both sides. UCM believes that until and unless this is done, there cannot be border demarcation and border fencing. The main reason for this is that the people are living on either side for so many years and all of a sudden based on satellite drawings and map, an imaginary line has been constructed as border line disqualifying the traditionally accepted boundaries between the peoples causing an atmosphere of uncertainty and animosity among them.

A glaring example is the recent issue of land encroachment at Mao area by the Angami people was strongly reacted by UCM and supported the Mao people for their right stand.

III. Strengthening peoples' resilience

UCM thus strongly felt the need for strengthening the peoples' resilience in such a conflict situation in Manipur. As we can see from the above facts that it is very important to meet ever evolving challenges from external and internal. It is a proven fact that the power of the people is the ultimate force against any injustice, foul political games, crime against humanity and anti people government deci-

sions. UCM also strongly believed that the current impasse after passing the Three Bills (Aug.31st, 2015 for the protection of indigenous people from migrants) by state legislative assembly will also be overcome with the passage of time and the people's resilience. UCM understands that many elements within indigenous groups are trying to play foul games through sensitive issues such as Kuki land, Nagalim etc. Further, UCM also acknowledges that instead of addressing the issues at a proper forum, some politician and leaders are capitalizing these situations for their selfish motives to remain in power. But fortunately, due to the sincere efforts of UCM and other CSOs, no untoward incident has taken place till date and it is good to hear that dialogue at the people to people level has started through the CSOs. Apart from this, other issues such as crime against women, communal harmony and peaceful coexistence are all indebted to the peoples' resilience and common struggle to fight these issues. In the words of Elangbam Johnson, the President of UCM- "In a democracy, peoples voice is the voice of God and has to be respected by all. But this peoples' voice has to be remained intact and united through our understanding and commonness so as to assert our problems and differences. We should not be swayed away by temporary political temperaments that might suit our isolated interest for a time being but rather should try to move towards a comprehensive peace process. We cannot have peace at home at the cost of our neighbours; we can only have an everlasting peace when our neighbours are also at peace."

CONCLUSION

Manipur, a peripheral and under-reported, state of India is in a state of transition. The constructive role of CSOs are utterly important for the social and political stability of the state. In reality, the CSOs are compelled to work under various pressure groups like state and non-state actors. UCM being an apex body of various organisations spear-headed a number of civil movements that threaten both the people and the state. Therefore, two significant conclusions are drawn from the current study. Firstly, UCM has a Para-political character in spite of being a CSO since it is particularly concerned with political discourse i.e. territorial integrity of Manipur. And, secondly the constraints faced by UCM are from being a non-political party, limited social domain, a low range entity vis-a-vis the state under Indian Federal System. Further, UCM notably taken up various initiatives like bringing territorial and emotional integrity of Manipur, building communal harmony, settling boundary issues and strengthening people's resilience. Significantly, the conclusions are in line with the theoretical import provided by Habermas through his concept of civil society and public sphere.

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